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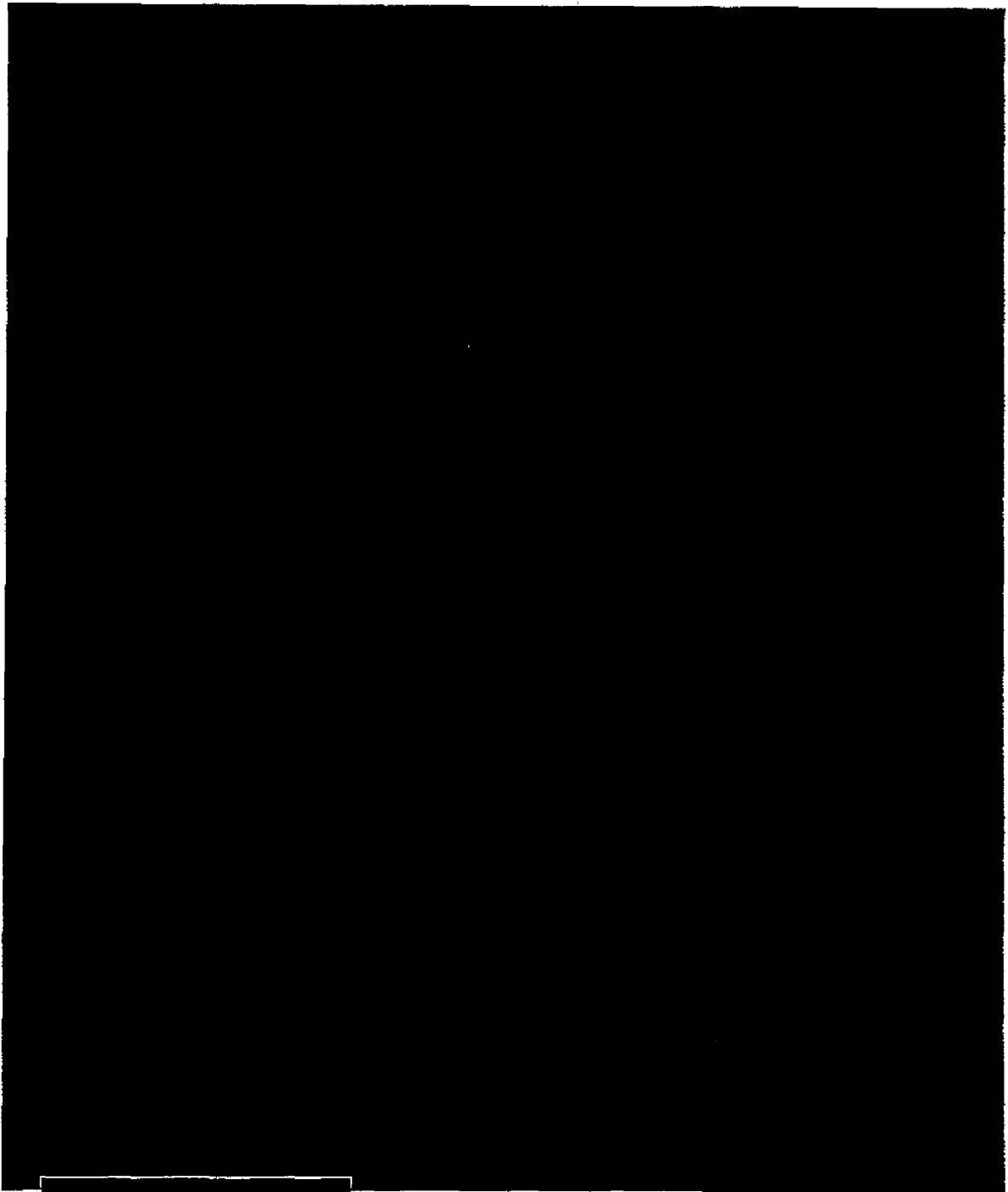
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## Chile

## Plebiscite Wednesday

The Chilean public will respond by plebiscite on Wednesday to President Pinochet's appeal for support in the face of "foreign aggression" on the human rights issue. Despite dissent within the junta, and against the judgment of his civilian supporters, Pinochet is determined to gamble on this "national consultation."

The consequences of enjoining the regime to popular judgment will almost surely exceed what Pinochet had in mind when he authorized his political brainchild. He evidently foresees at any personal victory in playing an nationalistic sentiment against foreign criticism. He may also have counted on the pervasive fear that has developed among the public that the military will somehow know how each individual votes.

Pinochet did not anticipate either the immediate or longer range risks in this venture. Unless the vote is overwhelmingly favorable and the election unquestionably clean, the prestige of the regime will suffer and Pinochet's personal chance to enhance the power of the presidency will falter.

At the same time, General Lagos will refuse to support the plebiscite. With the junta's division now in the public domain, some shakeup in the governing body will almost certainly be required after the vote is in. No clear mechanism exists to prevent this shakeup from becoming another embarrassing confrontation within the junta.

A longer range risk arises from Pinochet's implicit acknowledgment that the regime depends on popular support. The plebiscite is likely to create demands for other expressions of popular will.

Many Chileans believe the plebiscite will have a major impact on the country's future. The junta will not be able to ignore these expectations without further political cost.

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